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**Title:**  
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## GONE BUSH

Bantam Books

Edited by Roger McDonald

Photography by Nicolas Adler

202 Pages. RRP \$34.95

ISBN 0 947 189 79 3

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While throughout our history numbers of our writers and artists came to terms with the Australian bush, this has only become more general after World War II. The degree of this change is illustrated in this compelling book. The editor set out to have a dozen Australian writers set down their thoughts on a

particular bush place of personal significance. Most of them were not known for bush-related writing. Roger McDonald says 'I suggested a broad range of possible approaches: serious fiction in which the chosen place might play an important role; environmental arguments; comic fiction or non-fiction; naturalist-type explorations; bushwalking guides; meditations; thoughts on the changing meaning of 'the bush' to Australians; accounts of a journey or journeys; and testimonies to the meaning of place in Aboriginal experience. I asked the writers to keep the idea of a walk strongly in the forefront of their minds.'

Elizabeth Jolley writes of a small property on the edge of the bush where she walks, finding tasks to be done, and as is the way with such properties some of them will get done and some won't. The vixen has found a way into the goose pen, bitten off the heads of all the geese, taken all the goslings and unhatched eggs, and unaccountably left the gander alone and lost. She uses the shadow of a rake handle to guide him along the goose path- a tiny path made by the geese down to the dam and back. In unsuccessfully trying to remove the vixens staircase of foliage into the goose pen she hears 'the long leaves rustle sounding like a stream running in a place where water never runs. This is one of the deceitful things like the unhurried whispering

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never be entirely pure. The magic is often injected with the tincture of human suffering and anxiety.'

Elizabeth Jolley feels temporary and vulnerable in her landscape.

Judith Wright's walk is not of one who feels vulnerable so much as one who is angered. The bush through which she walks is one where the Aborigines have been defeated and died out, where the land has been ravaged by the diggings of goldminers. She reflects that a dam is going to flood the creek with its perfectly clear water, and flood too, the diggings where the wombats have taken over, and the platypus pools. Her sense of alienation is not from the landscape, the plants birds and animals which are natural there, but from the human intrusion. 'This is not my land,' she says, '-nor anyone's; greed and the passion for ownership have done it endless damage.'

Les Murray writes of a working forest - the forest where his family entered the timber industry in the 1920s. His is a sympathetic history of those who worked in forests, of the changes in the techniques, of how they lived in their landscape. "The reluctance of

country folk to do much walking in the bush, except from one felled tree to the one they mean to fell next, or in search of some specific product such as staghorn ferns or fruiting puddenie (*Billardiera*) vines, is one that goes back a long way, and is hardly ever fully conscious. It carries a suggestion of being abandoned, or lost, not sufficiently in control of things.' Writing of a series of naive paintings of the people of the area, none of them of people or places within the forest proper, he reflects that this is history well fitted to a quality of the bush itself. 'It is a quality not so much alien and indifferent, as too many literary authors by now have parroted, but rather sober, subtle and uncorrupt with a curious remote decency about it.'

Geoff Dutton writes not of Anlaby, but of the house the Duttons have owned for decades on Kangaroo Island at Rocky Point. He writes lyrically and throughout the piece there comes through an intense love of place. 'You can work,' he says, 'or say like Walt Whitman "I loaf and invite my soul"'. But working or not, you cannot help slipping into the community of bush life and sea life around you, it is both so thronging and so intimate. Moonlight across the water proclaims itself as a beautiful statement in a place like Sydney Harbour,

but there it is pointed at you, private, a message', and again, 'The bay of noon, the bay of evening. There are extraordinary effects of light on the bay. On one grey still evening slight ripples stretch out for a couple of kilometers and then slide into absolute calm. The horizon, very faint, becomes like the hinge of a long shell of which one mother of pearl face is the sea, the other the sky. The sun is setting behind cloud, but there is no connection between its flaming pyrotechnics and the gunmetal path of light across the water to the Point... Then the sun breaks away from the clouds and the whole western sky is reflected in the bay with a lucent depth like the inside of a ripe pomegranate.' The joy of place which invests works to which I constantly return, as varied as Axel Munthe's 'San Michele', Philip Oyster's 'The Generous Earth,' Louis Bromfield's 'Pleasant Valley' shines through

Geoff Dutton's piece; at Rocky Point he says, 'peace is as close as it can ever be.'

Roger McDonald's own chapter is of a shearer's cook, who recounts the busy work of the cook's day, and in the brief times of respite his thoughts of family and childhood in bush situations, and of another walk he had taken at Alison Downs station on which he got, briefly, lost. The worry of being lost in the Australian bush is a theme which recurs in the book. The sameness of the landscape over wide areas is something which visitors immediately are aware of. 'Same trees, same sky, same earth - all saying one thing and meaning another. Being lost was like being trapped in a photograph of somewhere I knew, but with no way to grab the third dimension.'

Sue Woolfe writes of a small girl growing up in the bush, her father an artist who made a living by house-painting and renovation. And for her the bush is not hostile. She is not certain that she has ever perceived it clearly, though she feels she is part of the bush, and it of her. 'The bush was too familiar for terror. The trunks of old gum trees in the sun



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Helen Garner writes of her being on a small property, 'three acres, more or less,' and her sense of things to be done, ~~and~~ but not done; of her coping with primitive conditions, of fears and things that went bump in the night, of a stiff visit by her father and later an emotionally unsuccessful visit by a man friend and his small daughter, of sitting on a bench under an olive tree, 'a bench for sitting still'. 'If I sit still, the afternoon sun fills the cup of the next valley with light, pours light into the cup of the valley till it is brimming over. Cup? Pours? Brimming over? This is nature sentimentalism, verging on the purple. Is it really what late winter sun in a valley looks like? Yes. It is. And lovelier, and more peaceful, more comforting; and the light on the tufted grass is more tender, and the wind drops, and whole landscape is holding its breath.'

Mudrooroo Narogin tells of a visit by himself and Humi to Stradbroke Island, to the home of Oodgeroo Noonuccal; of the beauties of the beaches and the wilderness, of sleeping by the sea and being visited

by a phantom which scares the wits out of them and then guides them in a fierce storm. They pass European developments which threaten despoilation. It is all vividly pictured.

Barney Roberts tells of how, from the small farms which he has lived on, he has made expeditions with his father and later with his sons to the country around Cathedral Mountain in Tasmania, his memories of hitchhikers and travellers whom he has helped to know this country, and then of the purchase by his sons of a block of 600 acres which they will save from felling for woodchipping. They choose a site for a hut. 'I couldn't imagine that any architect, any planner, any professional landscape gardener could so adequately design such careless perfection.' ~~They~~ They build a small hut with vertical boards stained with oil so it fits the environment. I built just such a place on the small property I had in Queensland. I know how it feels- good.

Jack Davis tells of his early life as a boy in the foothills of the Darling Ranges. It was life of considerable hardship, and led to his humping his bluey during depression years before the war. 'For all its

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To me this book is essential reading for all those who  
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Don Dunstan is a former Labor Premier of South Australia.

Amongst other works he published "Don Dunstan's Australia",

which was the basis for an A.B.C. series 'Australia -

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